

Every competent adult has the legal right to accept or refuse any recommended health care. This is relatively easy when people are well and can speak for themselves, however during severe illness or after an injury people are often unable to communicate their wishes. It is at these very times when many critical health care decisions need to be made.

The purpose of an Advance Health Directive, or and Advance Care Plan, is to give you a voice to communicate your wishes regarding the health care you desire.

What is an Advance Health Directive?

An Advance Health Directive allows you to state your wishes or directions regarding your future health care for various medical conditions. It comes into effect only if you are unable to make your own decisions.

Can anyone make an Advance Health Directive?

Yes, anyone who is over eighteen years of age and is capable of understanding the nature of their directions and foreseeing the effects of those directions can make an Advance Health Directive.

What do I need to consider before making an Advance Health Directive?

You should think clearly about what medical treatment you would like to receive and what quality of life you would like to enjoy if you become ill. For example:

- If treatment could prolong your life, what level of quality of life would be acceptable to you?

- How important is it to you to be able to communicate with family and friends?
- What technology is available for use in certain conditions?

You should complete this form with your doctor so they can explain the decisions you will be making and treatment options available. A doctor must also sign the form confirming you have capacity and understand the decision you are making when completing the form.

Can I change or revoke my Advance Health Directive?

Yes. Decisions you make in an Advance Health Directive are not final. You can change them at any time while you remain mentally capable of doing so.

It is wise to review your Directive every two years, or if your health changes significantly. If you do want to make changes to your Directive, you should destroy the current one and make a new one.

You may also revoke your Directive at any time.

Where can I get help with my Advance Health Directive?

Your lawyer can advise you about this document and your power and responsibilities under it.

Your doctor will need to explain any medical terms or other words that you are unclear about and explain treatment options. You may also wish to discuss your decisions with family members or close friends.

Who is involved in completing the Directive?

At least three people are involved in the completion of an Advance Health Directive:

1. *You, as the principal.*
2. *A doctor.*
3. *Your witness, who must be 21 years of age or over and must be a justice of the peace, commissioner for declarations, a lawyer or a notary public. He or she must not be your attorney, a relation of yours, a relation of your attorney, a beneficiary under your Will, your current paid carer or your current health-care provider (e.g. nurse or doctor).*

“Paid carer” does not mean someone receiving a carer’s pension or similar benefit, so you are free to choose someone who is receiving such a benefit for looking after you so long as they meet the other criteria.

What do I do with the completed Directive?

You should keep it in a safe place, and you should give a copy to your doctor, your attorney for personal/health matters if you have appointed one, and, if you wish, to your solicitor.

If you are admitted to hospital, make sure the hospital staff know that you have an Advance Health Directive and where a copy can be obtained.

You may also wish to carry a card in your purse or wallet stating that you have made a Directive, and where it can be found.